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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and
Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 107: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993
(continued) (A/46/6/Rev.1 and A/46/7)

AGENDA ITEM 108: PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued) (A/46/3, A/46/16 and Add.1,
A/46/173 and A/46/330)

1. Mr. SY (Senegal) said that the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 appeared to remain within the preliminary estimate established in General Assembly resolution 45/255, while at the same time providing for the activities called for in the medium-term plan. As noted in paragraph 28 of the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) (A/46/16), only a small percentage of the resources requested corresponded to activities that were not programmed in that plan. His delegation welcomed the improvements in the budget format. As far as methodology was concerned, however, it supported the criticisms and recommendations of CPC, especially with respect to the need for simplification.

2. The increase in the proposed programme budget could be viewed merely as a re-evaluation of the services provided for in the previous budget, with corrections for errors and inaccuracies and taking into account the scope of the additional missions entrusted to the Organization and the recent growth in the number of its Members. One could, perhaps, describe it as a zero growth budget, but zero growth was a potentially dangerous concept, and might lead to a debate which would undermine the ability to reach a consensus decision.

3. Although his delegation was in general agreement with the proposed programme budget, it thought that certain items, such as the establishment of additional posts or the reclassification of posts, could have been better explained and that some activities, such as those relating to international cooperation for development, should have been strengthened. It tended to share the view expressed in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (A/46/7) that further reductions could be made; it should be possible to achieve those reductions through a more rational use of the Organization's resources, greater rigour in certain activities and a well-thought-out restructuring of the system. In that connection, it would be necessary to balance flexibility with a respect for the priorities established by the General Assembly. The recommendations of ACABQ deserved careful consideration, especially since they also favoured the spirit of consensus.

4. With respect to programmes, his country supported the analyses and suggestions of CPC. It wished to emphasize the need for speed in formulating programmes; the need to involve the specialized agencies more fully in their preparation in order to reflect their concerns more fully and to take advantage of their experience; and the importance of coordinating and

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(Mr. Sy, Senegal)

monitoring programme performance. Lastly, while the programmes designed to strengthen human rights were of interest, it was essential to attack the true causes of human rights violations: poverty and famine.

5. His delegation concurred with the view of the Secretary-General and other delegations that Member States should make greater efforts to pay their contributions promptly and in full. At the same time, the Organization should make more effective use of its resources to fund priority activities better suited to the development needs of the great majority of Member States. Unless there was an improvement in the economic situation of the Member States, particularly those in Africa, those States would remain unable to fulfil all their obligations.

6. Mr. BAZABIDILA (Congo) said that his delegation shared the view of ACABQ that particular attention should be focused on the question of the ongoing financial crisis of the United Nations. It believed that Member States should participate in the entire budget process, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 41/213. The establishment of a working capital fund would be an effective solution for the Organization's financial crisis, which was presently aggravated by the failure of Member States to pay their contributions. As the Secretary-General had said in introducing the proposed programme budget, it was necessary to find a permanent solution to the timely payment of assessments both towards the regular budget and towards peace-keeping activities (A/C.5/46/SR.5/, para. 3). With United Nations activities increasing and arrears in the payment of contributions rising at the same time, that need was more urgent than ever.

7. Many Member States, however, lacked the necessary financial resources to pay their contributions. His country was currently in the midst of an unprecedented economic recession with the result that it could no longer pay not only its external debt, but also many of its domestic obligations. It was not enough to call for the prompt payment of contributions; practical solutions must be found to allow those countries which were experiencing financial difficulties to honour their commitments.

8. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 had been prepared on the basis of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997. It believed that the growth rate of 0.9 per cent was acceptable and in line with the recommendations of the report of CPC on the work of its thirty-first session. While it appreciated the efforts at rationalization discernible in the proposed programme budget, it wished to emphasize the need to distinguish between budgetary discipline and budgetary rigidity. It believed that, on the whole, the proposals submitted by the Secretary-General would help to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations system. It did not agree with ACABQ that the Secretary-General's programme performance report should be suspended (A/46/173, para. 3). The methodology for preparing the budget needed to be improved in order to guarantee greater harmony between the medium-term plan and the biennial

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(Mr. Bazabidila, Congo)

programme budget in terms of financial data. Similar activities should, moreover, be combined in order to achieve maximum savings.

9. In his delegation's opinion the proposed programme budget departed from the priorities which had been expressed in the medium-term plan and reiterated by the Secretary-General in his address to the Committee (A/C.5/46/SR.5, para. 6), namely, the maintenance of international peace and security, the economic development of developing countries, the economic recovery and development of Africa, the environment and international drug control. Most of the priority programmes - in particular those relating to human rights, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the economic recovery and development of Africa - had not received adequate funding from the regular budget. Extrabudgetary resources, too, needed to be allocated according to the priorities set in the medium-term plan. His delegation supported the idea put forward by the representative of Nigeria at the 10th meeting regarding the establishment of a separate unit in the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Cooperation to deal with the programme relating to the economic recovery and development of Africa.

10. Mr. CLAVIJO (Colombia) said that, on an annual basis, the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 would represent about 11 per cent of multilateral concessional aid, 3 per cent of bilateral concessional aid, 2 per cent of total official development assistance and only 1 per cent of official and private financial assistance to developing countries. Those percentages illustrated the disproportion between the ambitious goals and tasks of the Organization and the resources allocated to achieve them. At the same time, the limited volume of resources reaffirmed the urgent need for United Nations programmes to be coordinated with those of other organizations, both multilateral and bilateral.

11. He would limit his comments to a few topics which, in the opinion of his delegation, were of the greatest importance to the Fifth Committee. First, the principles of efficiency and effectiveness were relative and not absolute. In the face of the obvious growth of the activities entrusted to the United Nations, the Committee should base budgetary decisions not on the maintenance of previous levels of allocations but on resource performance in the light of a changing volume of work.

12. Second, although there were still obvious difficulties with the methodology for the preparation of the programme budget, the latter would eventually provide an important analytical tool. It would, however, never be able to replace an analysis of the budget in terms of the productivity of the programmes in each section. In that connection, the Committee should focus its analysis on the correspondence between the programme priorities in the budget and those in the medium-term plan. There appeared to be definite incongruities in a few sections, such as those on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Centre for Science and Technology for Development.

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(Mr. Clavijo, Colombia)

13. Lastly, in order to avoid the distortion of priorities, the Committee should look carefully at the volume and management of extrabudgetary resources, which were becoming more and more central to United Nations programme management.

14. Mr. KARBUCZKY (Hungary) said that Member States must meet their financial obligations to the United Nations budget. His Government had reviewed the decisions that had led to the accumulation of Hungary's arrears and would take steps to remedy the situation as resources became available.

15. The fact that the Organization stood at the threshold of major changes in its tasks and structure prompted doubts as to whether the programmes currently being budgeted would be the ones being implemented in two years' time. The limited number of changes between the current budget and the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 suggested that the latter was a product of bureaucratic inertia rather than of new thinking focused on the Organization's highest priorities. He also wondered whether the medium-term plan was the appropriate means of linking United Nations realities with the changing needs of the world social and economic situation. Although rigid, it was acceptable as a framework for the Organization's activities, but its nature was such that it could not enhance budget flexibility.

16. With regard to the actual budget proposals, it was important that they should be adopted by consensus since that would improve the chances of financial stability. If the Committee wished to remain committed to the new budgetary procedure established by General Assembly resolution 41/213, the budget outline must also be respected. As far as the budget figures were concerned, the current methodology had its merits but the question of whether to focus on nominal or real growth was left open. He agreed with those who believed that, in comparisons between consecutive budget exercises, initial estimates should be compared with initial estimates and revised appropriations with revised appropriations. The recommendations of the Group of 18 regarding continuous reform of the budget process should also be maintained.

17. With regard to specific points, the upward reclassifications that had been so widely criticized provided one way out of the problem of the current lack of career development, although that could not be a general solution. On the question of recurrent and non-recurrent items, he agreed with much of the criticism that had been voiced and supported the recommendation in paragraph 35 of the report of ACABQ (A/46/7) that the concept of non-recurrent resources should be discarded in the calculation of real growth. His delegation also endorsed the requests for more information on extrabudgetary resources, as well as the idea that a distinction should be made between support activities and activities covered by Parts I to VI of the proposed programme budget.

18. His delegation could support most of the Advisory Committee's recommendations for budget cuts. Further clarification was, however, needed on the question of unobligated appropriations and unliquidated obligations in order to facilitate a decision. Resources allocated to human rights and

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(Mr. Karbuczky, Hungary)

humanitarian affairs represented a mere 4 per cent of the proposed programme budget. A more dynamic increase in the resources of the Centre for Human Rights would be fully justified in view of its increased workload.

AGENDA ITEM 112: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued) (A/46/34, A/46/89 and A/46/219)

19. Mr. BENNETT (United States of America) said that, although his delegation had agreed to a proposal to defer substantive consideration of and action on the work of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) until the following session of the General Assembly, it wished to record its views on certain critical aspects of the report of JIU (A/46/34).

20. The Unit's assessment of the Secretary-General's efforts to implement its recommendations on improved programme performance reporting gave serious cause for concern. Little had been done to implement the proposals made in 1988 and the observations and recommendations included in the JIU report of that year were still entirely valid. His delegation shared the Unit's concern at the inadequacy of the existing programme performance reporting methodology and the proposed amendments to it.

21. According to paragraph 48 of the current JIU report (A/46/34), comments by United Nations agencies on 78 per cent of the Unit's reports produced between 1985 and 1991 had been tardy, the average delay being 163 days, or five and a half months, beyond the established time-limits. That was a deplorable situation and one on which the General Assembly should act as soon as possible.

22. Finally, JIU had requested extra staff and funds on the grounds that current resources were insufficient to meet its workload. His delegation was not convinced that additional staff were needed. A useful way of strengthening the Unit at no additional expense to the United Nations budget would be to invite Member States to make experts available to JIU, as recommended in Part Two, paragraph 26 (d), of the report.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.